



The following products have been proven to have adverse side effects and should NOT be taken:

**Ginkgo Biloba** — causes excessive bleeding if taking blood thinner.

**Comfrey** — contains cancer - causing chemicals.

**Borage** — may interact with anticonvulsant drugs to produce seizures.

**Sassafras** — oil contains cancer causing materials.

**Before using a herbal product or other supplement:**

- Research the product.
- Talk with your doctor, pharmacist or registered dietitian about your findings and your interest in taking the product.
- Listen to your doctor's, pharmacist's or registered dietitian's response, even if it is not what you may want to hear.
- If you decide to use a product, have it documented in your medical record.
- Set a time limit for using a product - a specific number of weeks or a couple of months.

- Try only one product at a time.
- Follow the directions on the label and start out with the lowest suggested dose.
- Check your blood glucose at least four times a day to see if the supplement affects your glucose levels.
- Write down the benefits you hope to gain from taking the product. Keep a diary to track your progress and note if the benefits are achieved.
- Discuss your progress with your healthcare providers at each visit.

Supplements lack other components of food that may be beneficial, therefore, they are not a substitute for good nutrition obtained from food. While supplements may help in some cases, the advice to "eat a variety of foods" is still the best way to obtain the essential nutrients that your body needs to stay healthy.



South Dakota Department of Health  
Diabetes Prevention and Control Program  
615 E. Fourth Street, Pierre, SD 57501-1700  
**1-800-738-2301**  
<http://diabetes.sd.gov>

2,000 copies of this document were printed at a cost of \$.13 per copy.

Rev. 8/07

# Diabetes & Herbal Therapy



Content adapted by the  
South Dakota Department of Health  
Diabetes Prevention and Control Program

## General Information:

Food has benefits that go beyond basic nutrition and may reduce the risk of disease or other health concerns. Persons with diabetes need to be aware of some concerns when supplementing their diabetes management with herbal therapy.

Many Americans are using dietary supplements at least occasionally. However, many products marketed have limited research to support health claims.

### Who Regulates Herbal Products?

The Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act (DSHEA) of 1994 regulates these products. However, manufacturers are not required to prove safety or effectiveness of their products.

Federal regulations require that statements made on the label be "truthful and not misleading."

Because there is not a standard for the supporting science, claims may be based on a single study having inadequate or flawed science.



### How Can One Tell If A Claim Is Not-Well Based In Science?

The following message must appear on ads for dietary supplements making health-related claims: "This statement has not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). This product is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease." This disclaimer should send up a "red flag". In contrast, health claims that now appear on food labels (for example, "diets low in saturated fat and cholesterol that include soluble fiber from oatmeal

may reduce the risk of heart disease.") are strictly regulated by the FDA and must meet the high standard of "significant scientific backing."

### What To Look Out For...

- If the claim sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Be skeptical.
- Look on the label for warnings and possible adverse effects.
- "Natural" is not the same as "safe."
- High doses of some dietary supplements may be harmful.
- Most products contain multiple ingredients and the active ingredient may not be identified.
- Evaluation shows contents vary from 0%-150% of the labeled ingredients. Look for "standardized." This is an assurance that there is some consistency in the amount of active ingredient in the formula.
- Do not use these products without speaking with your healthcare providers first, especially if you are pregnant or nursing. Do not give to an infant or a child.
- Avoid taking herbal products if you are on many prescription medications especially digoxin, warfarin (Coumadin), cyclosporine, or other pills with a narrow margin for a safe dose.